

# Evolutionary-Emergent Worldview and Anglican Theological Revision: Case Studies from the 1920s

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*This essay explores the theological work of Anglicans in the 1920s in response to the changes in intellectual culture brought about by “emergence” interpretations of evolutionary theory. Exploring the theologies of prominent Modernists and liberal Anglo-Catholics, specifically regarding anthropology and soteriology, the author concludes that on the criterion of internal consistency the Modernists were more successful. The author contends that one cannot fully appreciate the differences between Modernists and liberal Anglo-Catholics on matters of doctrine without accounting for the interplay of doctrine with aspects of worldview and metaphysics that mediate the expression of doctrine.*

“The traditional Christian dogma of original sin, its consequences and the mode of its transmission, as shaped in the West by St. Augustine, has always seemed to me . . . manifestly the most vulnerable part of the whole Christian account of the relations of God and man, and to call more imperatively than any other part of the theological system for reconstruction in light of philosophy and history.”

—A. E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Today we are used to thinking of human beings building genetically on millions of years of life, and life itself building on emergent

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<sup>1</sup> A. E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist* (London: Macmillan, 1930), 165.

layers of physical organization over billions of years. But as common prayer and personal piety often attest, we have not completed the task of digesting the theological implications of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' awakening to "deep time and space."

The dissonance motivates this essay. The decade roughly of the 1920s produced several Anglican theologies attempting to respond to evolutionary consciousness embedded in cultural worldview. These theologians were under the shadow of Karl Barth, but they were significant in their day and from this distance they provide us with an insightful case study in theological revision based on cultural forces.

My goal in this essay is to look at two particular themes in these works: theological anthropology and soteriology. In effect, these are always linked in theology. If we change our understanding of human origins, human moral and spiritual capacities, and the alienation of sin directly associated with them, then changes in the meaning of salvation soon will follow. A different answer to what went wrong leads to a different answer to how it gets fixed. The question is whether we see this connection developed consistently in the British theologians of this era.

I will consider major exemplars of liberal Anglo-Catholic and Modernist schools in this era. Different kinds of analyses have been done of each, and my goal is not to repeat these, nor to offer comprehensive treatment of the theologies. Rather, I wish to examine the theological anthropology in response to the emergent-evolutionary thinking of this era, and the proposed ways of looking at the saving effects of the incarnation. And I wish to evaluate these revisions primarily on the single criterion of internal consistency.

### *Emergence Theory, Metaphysics, and Doctrine*

I assume that biological theory (evolution) and theology are never in direct relation to each other. The relation is always mediated by philosophical and cultural assumptions contributing to the interpretation of experience, and I wish to show that these mediating factors explain theological differences between Modernists and liberal Anglo-Catholics as well. Both schools, for example, were incarnational in expression, but they did not mean the same thing by "God in human flesh." In the 1920s, different understandings of the doctrine of incarnation depended on the mediating roles of, first, emergence as an interpretation of evolution having still broader worldview implications, and second,

metaphysical beliefs. If the opening remark by A. E. Taylor catches the eye, it is because one sees the need for examination of this kind: placing theology in the context of broadly held perspectives in intellectual culture.

### *Emergence*

Generally, I am treating emergence as a contributing feature in a worldview.<sup>2</sup> It is one interpretation among others of the implications of evolution, which reach beyond biological sciences as regarding time and the nature of matter-energy, and which have a role in the production of values and new ideas. Philip Clayton, whose study will be cited below, sees emergence as a philosophical interpretation of data primarily in the life sciences, whose competitors are reductive physicalism and matter-spirit dualism. The philosophers Samuel Alexander, Lloyd Morgan, C. D. Broad, Alfred North Whitehead, and still others developed this interpretation, and their influence on the liberal Anglo-Catholics and Modernists in the 1920s is clear.

There were many efforts at interpretative synthesis that broadened the implications of evolutionary biology. Some attempted to integrate temporalized idealism (post-Hegel) and evolutionary principles, which ran the risk of confusing very different explanatory principles supporting evolution and development. Others, such as Henri Bergson,<sup>3</sup> essentially heirs of Descartes, posited a vital energy alongside matter and physical causality to account for the continuous creativity and the teleological appearance in the temporal process. In a more parsimonious vein, there were reductive-materialists, who assumed that all phenomena, including mind and spirit, would eventually reduce to bottom-up principles of physical causality.

Emergence was, in a sense, a *tertium quid* interpretation between the dualist assumptions of Henri Bergson's spiritualized evolution at one pole, and reductive materialism at the other. It is an interesting fact of history that emergence went out of favor for several

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<sup>2</sup> Detailed and comprehensive treatments of the nature and history of worldviews have been offered in recent years. See, for example, David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2008). My interest is to show how "emergence" as an interpretation of evolution had broader implications contributing to worldview. Regarding metaphysics, Owen Thomas has surveyed its use in recent work at the interface of theology and natural sciences in "Metaphysics and Natural Science," *Theology and Science* 7, no. 1 (February 2009): 31–45.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Dover, 1998 [1911]).

decades beginning in the 1930s,<sup>4</sup> but it has made an impressive comeback in the last twenty years. In a recent work, Phil Clayton helpfully outlines the major features of emergence in its contemporary renderings (spanning across a number of sciences, philosophy, and theology), and I will outline these features since, in simpler form, they were themes also captured in the early twentieth-century versions of emergence:

- (1) *Monism*: there is one natural world consisting of one kind of material “stuff” or matter-energy;
- (2) *Temporal emergence*: novel features of the natural world are realized over time, following a trajectory of complexity and corresponding to evolutionary principles discoverable in biology;
- (3) *Hierarchy of complexity*: the more complex structures consist in simpler parts, which are themselves “wholes” at earlier phases in natural history;
- (4) *Coherence*: the lower levels, or parts, constrain the possibilities that obtain at the higher levels, though the lower levels cannot sufficiently explain the features that obtain at the higher levels;
- (5) *Downward causality*: the higher levels in the organization are capable of causal influence on the embedded lower levels, from which they emerge;
- (6) *Pluralism*: there is one “stuff” (1, above) but variation in its expression, and this can be thought of in terms of richness, complexity, and range of relationships, or as effects, that is, as properties;
- (7) *Mind and spirit*: mind is not an entity alongside bodies, but the name for capacities that obtain at a particular level of organization of life.<sup>5</sup>

Again, one recognizes these features in early twentieth-century emergentists, and this in turn influenced the theologians considered in this

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<sup>4</sup> See Peter J. Bowler, *Reconciling Science and Religion: The Debate in Early-Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Philip Clayton, *Mind and Emergence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 60–62.

essay (though I will not contend they were entirely consistent in the application of them).

*Metaphysics*

At a still more comprehensive level, metaphysical commitments assert trans-empirical values which one takes to be the case across all possible worlds. This would include such possibilities as non-theistic naturalism, which reduces all phenomena, including mind, to physical explanation as ultimate; pantheism, which identifies God with world (each naming aspects of the same reality); panentheism, which conceives the world as within God but God as transcending the world; and classic theism, which more thoroughly distinguishes God and world (as Creator, God is wholly other than all finite creatures). It is important to note that the less comprehensive notion of “emergence” does not determine commitments at the level I have named metaphysical. Thus, “emergence” can receive pantheistic (S. Alexander), theistic (Lloyd Morgan), and naturalistic (C. D. Broad) interpretations at the more comprehensive level.

*Theology*

Now let us consider for a moment what it might mean to adopt an emergent principle in one’s perspective on the natural world. First, recall the story of human origins represented as “the fall.” We are familiar with both historical and mythic-symbolic renderings of it, which have in common a three-step progression: (a) an originally good, divinely intended creation with the human being oriented toward God; (b) a willful disobedience against God bringing about disorganization of the original good, both in the human being and in creation as a whole; (c) a restoration or reconstituting of the original intention through a central intervening divine action in history. In its many variations, the fall supposes this basic structure: original goodness—lost ideal—restored ideal. It fits the orientation of looking back in a quest to retrieve a lost good.

One might think this three-stage logic fits only a literal-historical reading of Genesis such as Augustine’s, but in fact symbolic and existential renderings of the fall fit within this pattern as well. Paul Ricoeur, for example, offers just such a post-Enlightenment symbolic rendering of “the Adamic myth,” which plumbs depths of religious consciousness the historic does not explore, thus giving new appreciation for the

story's power. But, in spite of the complexity, the symbolic rendering does not veer from the "fall" logic we have named: (1) original creation; (2) lost ideal; (3) restoration of ideal. What we see is the classic impulse to *recover* something.<sup>6</sup>

Now, turn from the cosmology—of fixed created things—in which such a picture originated to an emergent interpretation as background for understanding human origins and the human condition. Now a very transparent theology of *creatio continua* surfaces. If, as in an emergent worldview, the human being is "in the making" so to speak, and coming into moral capacities within a very complex environment, then the logic of "fall" is loosened, and with this change comes a change in spiritual tone. "Fall from what?" would be a reasonable question, as we contemplate human life emerging on the shoulders of the many species preceding it. The finitude and constraints at the phase of moral and spiritual awakening probably look more like trial and error in the process of pursuing value in one's environment, than rebellion. In the emergent view of human agency, the "fall" explanation appears to over-idealize the primordial finite will; it cannot do the explanatory work it has been given. And if moral and spiritual rebellion of finite creatures cannot sufficiently explain the origins of suffering, death, and evil (that is, if we can no longer deflect from divine responsibility for the world being the way it is), then attention turns to the question: What was God up to in creating a world such as this? One must protect the axiom of divine goodness and holiness in a different way.

The challenge is whether the evolutionary story of human origins can be interpreted so as to protect and illuminate the meaning of God's goodness and holiness, and offer a robust and religiously significant understanding of the human condition. If we begin to see the human being not as an actor on the stage of nature but as a fruit on the tree of nature, then there is no harmony to retrieve behind the present human condition, no ideal from which to fall, but a world in the making. Finitude itself is just the entanglement of the totality of natural conditions, and these may be ambiguous with respect to the perception of value. The deep "metaphysical" burden of this (accounting for suffering, apparent inefficiency, and disorder in nature) cannot be borne by human beings.

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

The initial conditions of moral and spiritual existence are fragile, consisting in trial-and-error process in pursuit of value, not a clear and distinct idea of an ultimate good to be pursued. Only slowly do the apertures of human vision open to see value in larger patterns beyond the narrow gauge of self-interest. Moreover, a vast network of biological impulses and environmental and social structuring is already in the background of the awakening of moral and spiritual capacities. Far from an original harmony and then lost good, the alternative depicts a slow path from narrow and local stimuli of action to expanding horizons of meaning in the framing of action—one might call this the “soul-making” tradition.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note—and this is often lost on those wedded categorically to the Augustinian tradition—that giving up “fall” as the *explanation* for the human condition does not mean giving up the concept of sin, or its catastrophic effects, or its amplifying effects in social systems. Insofar as “original sin” depicts every human life originating in the biases already present in human cultures and names the deep, haunting psychological uneasiness and alienation in human beings, this condition may be the case under a different explanation of its origin. So again, the revision we are considering does not overthrow the idea of sin; in fact, it proposes possibilities of interpretation already present in the theological history. The point is, at stake is an *explanation* for sin, not whether it is a valid *description* of the human condition.

### *Liberal Anglo-Catholic and Modernist Views about Human Origins and the Human Condition*

The diversity of responses to Darwin on the question of theological anthropology is noteworthy and informative. The Evangelical Charles Hodge understood evolutionary theory well and found it was necessarily in conflict with theology. The chief issue was the mode of divine creativity and action in the world. The liberal-minded Anglican Aubrey Moore accepted evolution of biological organisms but found no threat in this if God created the human soul. In his *Lux Mundi* essay, Moore attempted to apply a synthesis of evolutionary ideas and idealist teleology to the doctrine of God and divine action, but theological commitments prevented his seeing the full effects of his view.

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<sup>7</sup> John Hick developed the “soul-making” perspective in *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

For example, he held to the fall story because at stake was implicating God in suffering and evil.<sup>8</sup> Hodge's rejection and Moore's hesitation are both informative, as each finds something at stake theologically in a revision at the level of scientific interpretation.

More interesting and thorough by far was the theological anthropology of Frederick Tennant. He entered nearly a decade-long project on the topic of sin in response to hearing Huxley's Oxford lectures on evolution and theology. Tennant's thesis, though he too was a dualist in anthropology, was that human moral agency builds up from more primitive organisms and simpler natural systems. The substrates of voluntary and moral action are millions of years in the making. The natural evolutionary base of moral persons is both a blessing and a curse: a blessing because it is the root of life, the source of our experience, the connective tissue between ourselves and wider natural and social environments, and the source of motivational material in conscious and intentional action in the world. But these natural roots in biological impulses are also the motivating forces that can overwhelm moral attainment and set in motion courses of action that habituate patterns of narrow self-interest. At the onset of moral consciousness, humans struggle to prioritize the natural roots of action around moral ends; and at times the moral impulse is overwhelmed. Moral struggle is a phase in the trajectory of nature and history pushing beyond the priorities at earlier phases, but the earlier phases have left their traces on the individual through the evolutionary process.

Tennant was indebted to Augustine on two points: (1) the power of human sin, and the seeming inability to do the good in spite of the will to do so; and (2) the social nature of the human being, and the solidarity and unity in the mode and meaning of human experience. But he interpreted these phenomena quite differently. The story of Adam and Eve as a myth of human origins is about the crisis of moral awakening, more accurately conceived as a "rise" into the level of personal existence with inherited attributes from a pre-moral phase of consciousness.

Some have accused Tennant of defining sin as an anachronistic relation to outmoded instincts of the animal past, but his view was more complex than that: "*The material of sin* by no means suffices in itself wholly to 'explain' or account for sin, and indeed is to be sharply distinguished from sin; but it is nevertheless quite as essential

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<sup>8</sup> Aubrey Moore, *Essays Scientific and Philosophical* (London: Kegan Paul, 1890).



to the production of sinful conduct as the free activity of volition itself, since it supplied the motive to the will without which sin is not only inexplicable, but impossible.”<sup>9</sup> I mention Tennant here because his views were perhaps the first serious theological revision attempting to account for the new evolutionary framework. Moreover, there are elements of his theory that anticipate the emergent interpretation of evolution.

We are ready to move on to the exemplars from the 1920s. We begin with a liberal Anglo-Catholic, Charles Gore, who was in many respects most resistant to revision among the figures treated here. He is an interesting figure because over four decades his theology remained fairly consistent. Yet his essay “The Holy Spirit and Inspiration” in *Lux Mundi* was considered progressive, whereas the theology of *Reconstruction of Belief* thirty years later seemed by that time conservative. There and elsewhere he characterized sin as a matter of *will*, not *nature*. This contrasting of will and nature indicated a failure to appreciate the conditions for understanding will and intentionality. He also insisted on treating the origins of sin and alienation as “rebellion,” which has the intentional force of deliberate defiance. Sin, he states, was “treason to our higher capacity, which made man the slave of the flesh. . . . He was not meant to be an animal; he was meant to be a spiritual being.”<sup>10</sup> The assumption here is that there exists an already-in-place “true sonship” that could have held the “animal nature” in check. It is not a picture of moral creaturehood maturing or being in the making from unstable origins to greater maturity over time, or being essentially rooted in evolutionary relation to other species. Curiously, Gore wrote very sharply focused descriptions of evolutionary ideas, showing his grasp of them, but he resisted any serious revision of the idea of the fall.

N. P. Williams, in *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin*, challenged Gore’s theory by taking the traditional idea of fall quite seriously, as well as the contemporary evolutionary worldview. Williams believed that if Gore had really integrated evolutionary consciousness, then he would have treated biblical symbols of human origins differently. Using Freudian depth psychology, Bergson’s philosophy,

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<sup>9</sup> F. R. Tennant, *The Concept of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 140.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Gore, “On the Christian Doctrine of Sin,” in *Lux Mundi*, ed. Charles Gore, tenth edition (London: John Murray, 1902), 392.

and evolutionary theory, Williams projected the fall back to spiritual forces at work in the original manifestations of the cosmos. Dissonance originated before the onset of life; a fallen “world soul” accounts for imbalance in the created forces of sex, self-preservation, and group conscience. God would never have sanctioned life as we experience it, thought Williams, so the fall of the world soul was the best explanation for the world’s apparent disorder. What we find in Williams’s thesis is that struggles due to evolutionary process are not divine intention at all.

The Modernist James F. Bethune-Baker, like Williams, acknowledged evolution as a powerful natural explanation, which must be accounted for theologically; but dramatically unlike Williams, he sees the evolutionary process as a mode of divine action. The creation–fall–restoration program of Western theology must give way to immanent and continuous creativity and ascent of creaturely life. Evolutionary transitions, including human ones, are subtly incremental. Sin is tragic but it is not useful to tie nature and history to an imagined loss of primordial goodness. In this perspective sin is a reality within a total picture of ascent: “We know enough about man’s history to be able to say that it has been from the beginning a splendid struggle against almost overwhelming odds. Whatever plan there is, it has been part of it that man should fight his own way to higher stages of being and life.”<sup>11</sup>

Bethune-Baker depicts creation as a shaping and building process in which the natural world prepares for the production of spiritual beings. In this we hear echoes of the position of Tennant, and it challenges the core structure of fall-based theology. “There can be no question of restoration of what has never been,” he wrote.<sup>12</sup> There was “no pre-established harmony which the fault of man destroyed, no loss of an original good. We know, on the contrary, that there has been a slow approximation to harmony, a gradual attainment bit by bit. . . . We ought to slough most of the ideas which have given us doctrines of atonement . . . and we ought to work out instead this doctrine of the *Christus consummator*.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> B. F. Bethune-Baker, *The Way of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), 62.

<sup>12</sup> Bethune-Baker, *Way of Modernism*, 64.

<sup>13</sup> Bethune-Baker, *Way of Modernism*, 88.

Charles Raven, another Modernist, assumed with the philosophers of emergence Alexander and Morgan “the inherent oneness and regularity of the natural order. In the physical world, no student doubts that life is to be represented as a chain, in which the various forms of species are linked, and which stretches unbroken from amoeba to man.”<sup>14</sup>

On much Raven agreed with Bethune-Baker, but on two themes he appears to differ. First, he was more realistic than Bethune-Baker about the costliness of the natural process, calling attention to the jagged line of ascent. It is a road filled with blind alleys taken by the species that lead to costly error as well as growth in moral sensibility: “It amounts to this—that woven into the very woof and warp of the universe is the pattern of the Cross, that Nature is baptised in the Spirit of Jesus, that man’s creation was accomplished by the same means as his redemption.”<sup>15</sup> The freedom of communion is won through error, failure, and misuse of moral capacity once it is awakened. On this topic he anticipates the thought today of Holmes Rolston.

Second, Raven was sensitive to the social nature of human reality, and he developed it both theologically and in the context of a larger natural interdependence: “Individual spirits are the items of stuff that constitute the spiritual community, and the efficient presence of God. . . . In the chord of His richer Personality our limited personalities are subordinate notes. For the essential feature of personality . . . is substantial unity in its richest expression.”<sup>16</sup> The strong emphasis on the social dimension is realized eschatologically as the “body of God.”

The liberal Anglo-Catholic Lionel Thornton was perhaps the most capable theological interpreter of Whiteheadian natural philosophy. He believed creation could be seen in microcosm in the human being, the highest form of expression possible in the “organic series” (his term for the emergent evolutionary process), capable of apprehending eternal values and responding to them. Thornton held a picture of hierarchy from below conforming to the description of emergence just outlined. The parts have significance not only for the

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Raven, *What Think Ye of Christ?* (London: MacMillan, 1916), 23.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Raven, *The Creator Spirit* (London: Martin Hopkinson and Co. Ltd., 1927), 124. One senses a memory of the first World War in the background of such an utterance.

<sup>16</sup> Raven, *Creator Spirit*, 82–83. This theme is developed similarly in Majorie Suchocki, *The End of Evil* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY, 1988). See commentary on it in Joseph Bracken, ed., *World Without End* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005).

proximate wholes into which they are built, but ultimately for the series as a whole. In such a scheme, no entity is self-explanatory but finds its intelligibility in relation to what is above and below it in the cosmic series, and not as mere aggregates. The whole organism at any given level possesses properties not existent at simpler levels.<sup>17</sup> The human “spirit” is the name for capacities at the highest level of emergent reality having to do with intense individualization (self-consciousness, apprehension of meaning, pursuit of value) on the one hand, and an ever-richer social reality on the other.

Because of the way creaturely conditions are set up in this dynamic worldview—nature and history in flux, filled with unpredictability and novelty—moral and spiritual *instability* is inescapable. Greater levels of individuality and richness of social organization come at a cost of struggle and friction. The striving toward harmony seems to be a law of the series, but so also new phases of disequilibrium. In fact, sustained equilibrium eventually leads to stagnation and death. Evil is defined as whatever frustrates the dynamic movement of nature and history toward the future of God’s fulfillment. Thornton saw sin as the inevitable “non-attainment” of the moral good which comes from aligning oneself with dynamic and forward urges identified with God’s purposive action. In summary, flux and change is constitutive of both the environment of personal existence, and sin (non-attainment) is failure to keep pace with the patterned dynamic of God’s action.

William Temple, another liberal Anglo-Catholic theologian, developed a philosophy of value. As a metaphysical realist, his claim was that value is *in the world* every bit as much as facts. The pursuit of value—cognitive, aesthetic, and moral—is itself a good, but it is pursued through trial and error and under the conditions of personal finitude. The evolutionary path begins in the natural good of self-interest in pre-moral species, and must find a way at the moral level not to get stuck by converting the natural good of self-interest into the moral evil of self as the center of value. Error of judgment, under these conditions, seems inevitable as natural *self-interest* so easily turns to *self-centeredness* once moral and spiritual consciousness emerges. So there is risk in the pursuit of value among finite agents: the possibility,

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<sup>17</sup> See Lionel Thornton, *The Incarnate Lord* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928), 36–37.

indeed likelihood, of failures along the way, and their deleterious effects in the form of sin, ignorance, and ugliness.

Temple treats finitude itself—the self who possesses only local perspective in time and space—as a contributing factor to sin. It is virtually inevitable that value judgment will be distorted in the limits of one’s finite context, so that *apparent* value (the finite person’s point of view) and *real* value (the God’s eye point of view) will not fully correspond. “So soon as this [dawn of consciousness] happens it is at least most highly probable that the finite spirit, having a narrow range of apprehension, . . . will regard as more important those which affect itself. . . . And self-centeredness is sin.”<sup>18</sup> The beginning of moral awakening is vulnerable, and ironically, a fall is only possible because of ascent. It is the tragic side of rising into spiritual capacity.

We have seen that in each case, whether it be liberal Anglo-Catholic (Thornton, Temple, Williams) or Modernist (Bethune-Baker, Raven), there is a revision of a theological account of the human condition based on an emergent-evolutionary worldview, or in Williams’s case, a Bergsonian evolutionary worldview. Now we turn to Christology, where the differences begin to take shape. If we see finite moral and spiritual agency of persons differently, based on the emergent interpretation of evolution, what then is the effect on incarnational soteriology? When we do the same kind of overview on this issue, some interesting differences surface, which will distinguish liberal Anglo-Catholics and Modernists more clearly.

### *Liberal Anglo-Catholics and Modernists on Christology*

Before we survey the Christologies of the Modernists and liberal Anglo-Catholics we must review the conceptual relations that obtain between particular doctrines, the emergent interpretation of evolutionary theory, and broad metaphysical commitments.

At the most comprehensive level we find the Modernists expressing the immanence of God’s action within a panentheistic outlook. In contrast, we find the liberal Anglo-Catholic theologians committed to traditional theism with its assumption of God–world duality. These theological differences at the broad level can be roughly defined in

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<sup>18</sup> William Temple, *The Centrality of Christ* (New York: Morehouse, 1936), 66. We have here an expression of what John Hick would later name the “agency making” theory of sin and evil. Also, see William Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, Lecture 14, “Finitude and Evil” (New York: Macmillan, 1934).

the following way. Panentheism depicts the world as within the all-comprehensive reality of God. The “in” relationship is analogical since God is beyond spatial categories. The God–world relations are internal in that God and world affect each other.<sup>19</sup> Traditional theism holds to a sharper God–world distinction: the world as God’s creation is finite reality wholly other than God, though God as its source is intimate to creation as the ground of its existence, its processes, and its causal relations, and as author of particular actions beyond the regularities of natural process.

What we discover is that both a panentheist and a traditional theist can hold a doctrine of incarnation but mean something very different by “God in human flesh.” The one is prone to see incarnation as novelty within the creative process expressing God within, or “from below,” and the other sees incarnation as an entrance into finite reality in some extraordinary way, or “from above.” The characterization of the divinity of Christ and divine action, the saving effects of Jesus’ life and total vocation, finds expression through the complex relation of worldview, broad commitments of this sort, and particular doctrines.

#### *Liberal Anglo-Catholic Christology*

We have mentioned that Charles Gore was the most cautious in his revision. The moral and personal categories are basic to his thought as an ethical monotheist. Incarnation, for example, is the “fact” of divine personal identity entering nature and history in a human being, Jesus.<sup>20</sup> Christ is not from *within the natural world* as a newly emergent phase in history; the “new” he represents is from *beyond the world*, and his essential identity is not human but divine. For Gore, “transcendence” must be understood within the model of the world as wholly other than God.

Gore places Christ within the prophetic tradition of Israel, and develops principally redemptive themes in his treatment of incarnation. Christ is the sacrifice that “unloosed God’s mercy.” He stressed an objective, propitiatory function—a sacrifice, which frees the flow of God’s love: “In humanity as it stands there is something radically perverted, in view of which it needs for its salvation something quite

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<sup>19</sup> See John Culp, “Panentheism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2009); <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/panentheism/>.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Gore, *The Reconstruction of Belief*, new edition in one volume (London: John Murray, 1926), 180.

different from mere example or encouragement to make the best of itself—it needs fundamental reconstruction by Him who originally created it.”<sup>21</sup>

Again, he states, “All the communications of God to men presuppose that the normal relations of earth and heaven have been interrupted. To deny this is not to question God’s truth in one particular point, but to question it altogether.”<sup>22</sup> Quite clearly, Gore represents a relatively undisturbed depiction of the creation–fall–redemption model. The work of the incarnation is to redeem, and to do this it must come from above as the intervening action of God.

Lionel Thornton’s interpretation starts out as if modeled on emergence theory. The evolutionary process is guided by an immanent presence of God. The new “wholes” which emerge from simpler ones in the ascending series represent higher principles of organic *unity*, and each a more comprehensive relation to the eternal order. “The structure of the universe is that of a space–time series interwoven with patterns of eternity.”<sup>23</sup>

The human being represents the highest capacities reached in the emergent world, the spiritual capacities naming both the intense individualization and quality of social relations achievable in the human species. But this emergent process lacks a finishing touch, and at this point Thornton folds the redemptive theme into a more comprehensive understanding of soteriology as divinization, or assumption of humanity into the divine life.

Here, Thornton makes a startling transition: from divine action as an emergent process from within, to the completion of finite spiritual being *via* the incarnation—Christ as “absolute actuality”—from outside. Incarnation is an intervention in natural and historical process to communicate the eternal in creation in a way decisive for human salvation: a new regime, self-harmonization, and a new social reality, which cannot be attained solely by way of God’s action from within.

Christ himself is not a product of history’s cumulative development but one who enters history from beyond it,<sup>24</sup> appearing as a new evolutionary species, drawing human beings into divine life. But this is only emergent phenomenon in appearance, since the new creation

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<sup>21</sup> Gore, *Reconstruction of Belief*, 553.

<sup>22</sup> Gore, *Reconstruction of Belief*, 552.

<sup>23</sup> Thornton, *Incarnate Lord*, 429.

<sup>24</sup> Thornton, *Incarnate Lord*, 164.

(species) does not really come from within the dynamics of natural processes. Thornton's Christology combined with classic theistic commitments lead to a supernatural solution, realized in time. Christ transfers supernatural gifts necessary to complete the organic process, instilling what the emergent process cannot itself produce.

Thornton's interpretation fuses Christology and eschatology such that transformation is realized in history. "The more universal, transcendent and absolute in contrast to his creatures the character of God becomes, the more intimately does He penetrate nature."<sup>25</sup> The work of incarnation is principally divinization.

We find in William Temple that the incarnation is at the heart of a metaphysical structure, which bears the marks of an emergent worldview. The Logos of God is present within all aspects of reality: personal, historical, organic, and cosmic. Jesus could not be appreciated as the *incarnation* of God, if signs of divine presence were otherwise absent in creation.

Temple changed his view about incarnation between his early and mid-career years. In *Christus Veritas*, he strengthened and specified his claim that in Christ we encounter an essentially divine personality: "The self that He reveals is more than human, more than super human; it is specifically divine."<sup>26</sup> What remains primary both early and late is that the *effect of Christ is the revelation of the character and will of God as self-giving love*. In effect, the thesis of redemption is subsumed under revelation, as the disclosure of God's love. Once we appreciate the utter graciousness of divine self-giving revealed in Jesus, it has the power to turn the human heart toward God and reorient the center of value in one's action.

The incarnation, then, is a new and most dramatic presentation of what is always the case about God's disposition toward the world, always realized in ways appropriate to particular phases of creation's history. Here the effect of incarnation is primarily revelation able to inspire and turn the human heart. So, unlike the expression we found in Gore about releasing the flow of God's love, the chief point in Temple is about releasing the responsive love of finite persons.

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<sup>25</sup> Thornton, *Incarnate Lord*, 139.

<sup>26</sup> William Temple, "The Divinity of Christ," *Foundations: A Statement of Christian Belief in Terms of Modern Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 249; and William Temple, *Christus Veritas* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 123.



Once again, as with Thornton, Temple's *Christus Veritas* develops a roughly emergent picture, but rather abruptly introduces the incarnation as a phenomenon from beyond the emergent process, and outside nature. Only God can reveal Godself, and within classic theism this takes as act "from above."

### *Modernist Christology*

From Bethune-Baker's loosely panentheistic outlook—"God transcending the process in which he is nonetheless inherent" and "Christ as the supreme manifestation of Him that has emerged in the process"<sup>27</sup>—God indwells the orderly and continuous emergence from simple material structures toward life, mind, and finally spirit in the world. Christ is interpreted as the supreme manifestation of divine reality that has emerged in this process.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the Logos becoming flesh is an immanent mode of God's action. It is God's self-communicating presence from within, giving the diversity within the universe its unity and order, and moving it toward its given purpose, especially in moral and spiritual creatures. "The whole process is divine and we are led by a continuous chain from the lower to the higher in the evolution of human personality, till we come to the One Manifestation in which men have most fully found and seen and known God."<sup>29</sup>

Bethune-Baker recognized that this interpretation presented a hermeneutical challenge since neither emergent worldview nor panentheism is what we find in the background of first-century Scriptures. Somehow one must distinguish time-conditioned cultural products of every era from the truth of *kerygma* conveyed through it. Thus, he treated the Scriptures as picture language: "Evolution is the hieroglyphic of natural science, and Incarnation the hieroglyphic of Christian theology."<sup>30</sup> He attempted to find the moral and spiritual intent of gospel distinct from the cultural form. The gospel writers' *worldview(s)* cannot control our conception of the relation of God to the universe, and this puts interpretative pressure on the readers of Scripture.

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<sup>27</sup> J. F. Bethune-Baker, *The Way of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), 150.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in W. Norman Pittenger, "The Christian Apologetic of James Franklin Bethune-Baker," *Anglican Theological Review* (October 1955): 1.

<sup>29</sup> Bethune-Baker, *Way of Modernism*, 86.

<sup>30</sup> Bethune-Baker, *Way of Modernism*, 75.

Bethune-Baker saw Jesus united to God in thought, feeling, purpose, and activity: "From an evolutionary point of view He was a product of the past. . . . But He was also new, an emergence of a new consciousness, . . . a new type of manhood, a new specialization."<sup>31</sup> Insofar as Jesus was this, he was the clearest expression of what we can know about God. Moreover, every person has the potency of becoming a child (son) of God in this sense, though Jesus is uniquely and fully so. This basically eschatological status is something in the making, or trying to find expression.

At its heart we see Jesus as exemplary of "a way" for humanity, and this complemented the Eastern idea of "*Christus Consummator*."<sup>32</sup> Jesus is the forerunner and example, who reveals the end toward which we aim. This perspective is a rejection of transactional Christology, which divides history into the before-and-after of saving action, and in its place posits a punctuated but emergent ascendancy toward spiritual fulfillment. Bethune-Baker presents a more seamless relation between creating and redeeming action within nature and history. The panentheistic backdrop is expressed in the following remark: "When we regard it [human experience] as the highest outcome yet achieved of the whole cosmic process, and that process itself as having deity as its inherent urge and the emergence of deity in its fullness as its goal, we know that everything that tends to the highest qualities of which we have experience . . . is an indication of what is ultimate and real. . . . It is in us and through us that the next stage must be reached."<sup>33</sup>

If anything, Charles Raven is even more obviously panentheistic in his outlook, and in most respects his vision of the effects of incarnation is that of Bethune-Baker's. Salvation is in the promise of the *completion* of God's creation, not the *total remaking* or reconstructing of a ruptured creation. But he was nevertheless able to make more of the reality of nature's struggle, and human suffering as a high instance of it, which allows human beings to reach depths they would otherwise not reach. "Without suffering there would be no sympathy, without pain no discipline or compassion, without struggle no progress,

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<sup>31</sup> Bethune-Baker, *Way of Modernism*, 89.

<sup>32</sup> Bethune-Baker, *Way of Modernism*, 88. This term characterizing the central role of Jesus Christ is no doubt a mark of the influence of Bishop Westcott's *Christus Consummator* (London: Macmillan, 1890).

<sup>33</sup> Bethune-Baker, *Way of Modernism*, 90.

without evil no forgiveness and no virtue.”<sup>34</sup> Christology from below could be seen to complement the emergent and panentheistic commitments. He used trinitarian symbols to emphasize God’s indwelling presence: “Creation, Incarnation, Inspiration should surely be regarded as different phases of a single process.”<sup>35</sup>

The crucifixion as paradigm event informs the meaning of suffering at all levels of nature and history, a theme accented decades later by Arthur Peacocke and Holmes Rolston. Raven emphasizes that, first, ascent toward higher realization is through struggle; second, personal growth is grounded in finite natural and historical process, within which God actualizes transformations; and third, social solidarity at the core of spiritual fulfillment participates in divine reality. Raven was aware that to build a panentheistic theology in an evolutionary context, one must make the case that the massive evidence of suffering could be fitted to a purpose-filled end.

In turning to Hastings Rashdall we find a figure who was not among emergentists, but rather influenced by British idealists for whom there is an affinity between finite mind and Mind of God. This becomes the wedge by which Rashdall constructs a bottom-up perspective on Jesus’ divinity. It is rooted in a different metaphysic but complementary to the panentheistic aim. Rashdall insisted on the fully human character of Christ’s consciousness.<sup>36</sup> The finite mind of Jesus could participate in the divine mind. Also, the religion of Jesus needed to remain at the core of the shift to religion *about* Jesus, thus connecting his career to claims about his saving effect.

The premise of affinity between finite consciousness and divine reality becomes a hermeneutical principle with similar effect to the divine immanence thesis in the pantheism of Bethune-Baker and Raven. Rashdall claims that we cannot speak of God incarnate in Christ unless we can speak of the God in all finite persons. Jesus is a supreme incarnation of what is the case in diminishing degree in others. In fact, if Logos were not already present in other human beings, they would not recognize its unique and decisive presence in Jesus: “If we believe that every human soul reveals, reproduces, incarnates God *to some extent*; . . . if we believe that up to the coming of Christ

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<sup>34</sup> Charles E. Raven, *Jesus and the Gospel of Love* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), 421.

<sup>35</sup> Raven, *Creator Spirit*, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Hastings Rashdall, *Philosophy and Religion* (London: Duckworth, 1909), 175.

there had been a gradual, continuous, and on the whole progressive revelation of God . . . , then it becomes possible to believe that in One Man the self-revelation of God has been signal, supreme, unique."<sup>37</sup>

Rashdall was prone to look for simple, practical, and direct expression of the truth of the incarnation: "Think of God as you think of Him [Christ], and you will know about God all that man can know about God. Love God as you cannot but love Him, and you will be loving the God who is manifest in Him. . . . In Christ we see . . . God revealed under the limitations of humanity."<sup>38</sup>

Insofar as faith means devotion inspired by and exhibited in Christ's life, which establishes the way of repentance and love, then the difference between Paul and the Jesus of the synoptic gospels vanishes. Rashdall entirely rejects the idea of the cross as a decisive intra-divine transaction that saves. Jesus' death must be seamlessly connected to the whole life, and as a whole it is atoning. The strength of Rashdall's study was in holding to a simple and practical consensus regarding atonement. Throughout the history of theology one will find revelation, education in the most holistic transformative sense, imitation, and inspiration as necessary conditions of expressing what Christ has done for us. Some may add more, but these elements are always present.

### *Drawing Conclusions*

Most liberal Anglo-Catholics and virtually all Modernists recognized that an evolutionary account of human origins altered the context for thinking about divine creativity, the human condition, the possibility and meaning of divine-human relationship, and its obstacles. Among the liberal Anglo-Catholic figures, Gore thought that this context did not warrant any major shift from the Western creation-fall-redemption pattern. But we have seen that other liberal Anglo-Catholics were more adventurous in their revisions, motivated by the quest for intelligibility within contemporary culture.

The greatest differences between the liberal Anglo-Catholic and Anglican Modernists came down to the meaning of incarnation

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<sup>37</sup> Hastings Rashdall, *Jesus Human and Divine* (London: Andrew Melrose, Ltd., 1922), 20.

<sup>38</sup> Rashdall, *Jesus Human and Divine*, 44. See also Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement* (London: Macmillan, 1919), 446-448.

and the soteriology expressed by means of it. I have contended that to account for this theological difference regarding incarnation requires attention to the interaction between an emergent interpretation in the worldview and metaphysical commitments.

Gore, Thornton, and Temple attached the outlook of emergence to classic theism, a God-world distinction in which the world is wholly other than God, though God is source and cause of all existence. Thus, to act in the world beyond the mode of action indicated in primary causality, God enters as if from outside these processes and structures. The created world is wholly other than God, so what we call special divine action (for example, the incarnation) constitutes an intervention. Thus, liberal Anglo-Catholic theologians held an emergent outlook, while asserting also that the incarnation was a universal and absolute intervention of God in nature and history, principally to *reconstruct and redeem*, or to *divinize*, or to *reveal*, depending on the theologian.

Incarnation represents a decisive “before and after” of history, an old and a new age, either in terms of “fallen, then restored” (Gore), or in terms of “incomplete, then complete” *imago Dei* (Thornton). For Thornton, this “before and after” within nature and history was an abrupt closure to the emergent picture he developed earlier in the project, and the stark transition seems unconvincing and unexplained.

Temple comes closest to a mediating ground in that incarnation represented for him a new and decisive degree of disclosure of and appreciation for the depths of an unchanging divine love, thus maintaining a more historical continuum between created origins and creation’s fulfillment. His agreement with other liberal Anglo-Catholics is in his insistence, especially by the time of writing *Christus Veritas*, that Jesus Christ is an essentially divine personality, understood in a classic theistic way.

Bethune-Baker and Raven found an emergent worldview easily extended into a pantheistic theology. The world, as creation, is in a sense *within* the divine life, though God is not exhaustively known or identified with finite creation. This picture shifts the dynamic of God’s immanent and transcendent relations to the world. In the metaphor of pantheism, God is *in* the world (meaning that the world expresses quite directly and immediately an aspect of God’s actuality), and the world is *in* God (meaning all things dwell within divine reality even though divine reality is not exhaustively presented by the world).

This immanence, however, is an expression from the “within” point of view of God’s transcendent purpose and aim for the whole of creation. There is room in this outlook, in other words, for the mystery of God, the inexhaustible “more” of God beyond nature and history.

Modernists, having given up the fall explanation of the human moral and spiritual condition, require less regarding the saving effects found in the incarnation. Jesus becomes the supreme instance of the divine promise to bring creation to fulfillment. As a timely revelation of divine will in a human life, Jesus inspires change in the human heart and in human community, and offers an example of a corrective path morally and spiritually. Incarnation *reveals, inspires, and pioneers*, and comes as novelty from within nature and history—it is a special and unique expression of divine presence within material existence more generally.

The evolutionary-emergent explanation for the human moral condition turns the focus on finitude as such: moral failure is “so inevitable as to be practically necessary” (Temple) when creating a finite moral and spiritual species over a scale of evolutionary time, on the shoulders of other species, and under complex and ambiguous conditions, not transparent ones. The human being is not once made, then lost, then found. The human being is a fruit of creation, which is still in the making. Jesus represents the “breaking out”<sup>39</sup> of God from within, insofar as a human being aligned with divine intention within the world can do this. As such, supremely in Jesus we see God, and this essentially is the meaning of incarnation: it constitutes revelation (of divine love), inspiration, and an example of the human way toward the fulfilling of its potential, and it constitutes promise of the future.

As critics have noted, Modernists did not account adequately for the tragedy of human sin—for example, self- and group deception, systems of violence, the whole range of moral failure. Were they lacking in critical judgment about the dark side of Western culture that Freud and others had exposed? Certainly one must question whether the *attitude* of the Modernist would be credible in a post-Holocaust and post-nuclear context. But this is a judgment on the residual spirit of progress in Victorian culture, not on the Modernists’ *explanation*

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<sup>39</sup> A phrase coined by Christopher C. Knight to express an Eastern Orthodox perspective on panentheism in his essay “Theistic Naturalism and the Word Made Flesh,” in *In Whom We Live and Have Our Being*, ed. Arthur Peacocke and Philip Clayton (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 48–61.

for sin issuing from an emergent-evolutionary worldview, and this distinction needs to be maintained in order to appreciate their contribution. One may reject the attitude while finding credibility in the explanation. Still, there remains a very challenging problem: If one is a realist about the existence of such horrors and violence, and also claims the world to be part of God's actuality, then one must explain anew what divine goodness means.

The Modernists were preoccupied with the positive side of the ascending trajectory of emergent processes: the object of religion—the disclosure of God's love for us—is to “make us better.” It struck some as naive, and inspired H. Richard Niebuhr's derisive remark that liberals believed that a “God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”<sup>40</sup>

Leaving aside the sarcasm, could one not turn the tables on the more orthodox critics and ask: What practical merit has the fall explanation contributed to the solution of human violence and the perpetuation of suffering, or the urge toward competitiveness? How have pieties centered in lamb-slaying, debt-paying, human form-restoring, and all manner of proposals about interventions that assert a trans-empirical transaction in the middle of history made a difference? One wants to know, in other words, What warrants the claim that things have changed? Did Christ free the flow of God's love in an act that restores fallen humanity, or completes from heaven the human being in ways that emergent natural process could not? Is it a mysterious change in souls, a picture of outer and inner worlds, or a history within history? To take the divinizing model as an example, if Christ has indeed come from outside history to infuse in the human species what the emergent process could not achieve, then where is the evidence for this? For a theologian such as Thornton, who finds it worth tracing evidence of emergence *before* incarnation, wouldn't there be evidence with respect to certain new capacities of relationship and levels of community *after* the incarnational entry into the world?

The Modernist solution is practical, and it did not need to pose Jesus' divinity as something that separated him in substance from other human beings, nor as something that divided history so dramatically. There are no transactions to perform because no reconstructing

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<sup>40</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1937), 193.

of fallen nature is proposed. But we may still find meaning in the cross without making decisive transactional assignments. The incarnation is a supreme instance of God's "breaking out" from within the processes of the world to steer a course toward creation's future fulfillment. By seeing nature and history as continuous, while also acknowledging revelatory punctuations in the stream of time, we receive a picture of promise for creation's future similar to what in recent years has been pronounced by Jack Haight, the late Arthur Peacocke, and many others in the liberal tradition. This picture retains the notion of Christ as revelation, inspiration that changes hearts, prophet of repentance (the correcting of biased will and the sinful effects that accompany moral and spiritual efforts), and exemplar. The view of incarnation is modest and so too its vision of the human being: we are finite creatures, and incarnation marks a new level of appreciation for and surrender to God-presence, but nothing so dramatic as reconstituting a fallen nature, or completing the human being in a realized eschatology.

In summary, regarding the identified topic of evolution and theology, the following factors work together in the Modernist revisions: (1) emergent theory contributing to change in explanation for the human condition; (2) panentheistic tendencies that find God's action as immanent within natural processes; and (3) modest, bottom-up interpretations of incarnation that reject transactional theories and center on the saving effects of revelation—inspiring a change of heart and the pioneering of a new way. The account is minimalist to be sure, but it is internally consistent. The soteriology proposed is future-oriented, and consistent with the historical and natural continuities in the worldview and metaphysical background.

I have noted that liberal Anglo-Catholics seem less consistent in at least this one respect: they did not account for how their appreciation of emergent evolution fits with decisive "before and after" accounts of incarnation. If the personality of God has been *enfleshed* uniquely and absolutely as an intervention in history to reconstitute or reconstruct persons, then how does one account for the "before and after," empirically and practically? If we cannot say what constitutes the "before and after" difference, then isn't the claim arbitrary relative to the continuous, emergent picture? It is difficult to make decisive judgments about the success of the two schools. But on at least this one matter of internal consistency (doctrine explicated in the



broader interpretative framework for what we take to be the case), it seems the liberal Anglo-Catholics have more explaining to do.

I have mentioned that serious problems remain for Modernists and other panentheists who follow: How do finite agents retain discrete identity if all finite realities are in God? And if all finitude is within God, then how is God *not* identified with evil and suffering? One route worth exploring is to conceive God as a complex oneness: God as source of all reality, but also responsive to the open processes that flow from God. Divine love makes room for differentiation and freedom of at least a qualified kind within the whole. Could there be a trinitarian panentheism? The Modernist ideas presented serious moral and spiritual possibility still being developed. But one also must admit they cut deep into the assumptions which have held Christian theology together in the West for centuries in addressing the problem named by A. E. Taylor at the beginning of the essay.